XIX. *An Account of the remarkable Alteration of Colour in a Negro Woman: In a Letter to the Reverend Mr.* Alexander Williamſon *of* Maryland, *from Mr.* James Bate, *Surgeon in that Province. Communicated by* Alexander Ruſſel, *M. D. F. R. S.*

To the Rev. Tho. Birch, *D. D. Secret. R. S.*

SIR,

Read, 10 May, 1759. SOME account of the extraordinary facts mentioned in the incloſed letter having been communicated to me, above a year ago, by the Reverend and ingenious Mr. Williamſon of Maryland, I thought them worthy of attention; and therefore begged, that he would be ſo kind, as to get ſome Gentlemen of the faculty to aſſiſt him in making a further enquiry. He has accordingly tranſmitted to me the caſe, now ſent you, as related by Mr. Bate, a practitioner in phyſic, of ſome note in that part of the world.

I have alſo had the particulars ſince confirmed to me by two Gentlemen now in England, who have often ſeen the woman; ſo ſhall make no farther apology for giving you this trouble, in order to its being communicated to the Royal Society.

I am, Sir,

Your moſt obedient humble Servant,

Limeſtreet, May 8th, 1759. Alexander Ruſſell.

SIR,

SIR,

IN compliance with your deſire, I ſend as particular an account of the extraordinary metamorphoſis obſervable in colonel Barnes's negro woman, as I have been able to procure.

Frank, a cook-maid of the above-named Gentleman, a native of Virginia, about 40 years of age, remarkably healthy, of a ſtrong and robuſt conſtitution, had her ſkin originally as dark as that of the moſt ſwarthy African; but about fifteen years ago, obſerved that membrane, in the parts next adjoining to the finger nails, to become white. Her mouth ſoon underwent the ſame change, and the phænomenon hath ſince continued gradually to extend itſelf over the whole body; ſo that every part of its ſurface is become more or leſs the ſubject of this ſurpriſing alteration. In her preſent ſtate four parts in five of the ſkin are white, ſmooth, and tranſparent, as in a fair European, elegantly ſhewing the ramifications of the ſubjacent blood-veſſels: the parts remaining ſooty daily loſe their blackneſs, and in ſome meaſure partake of the prevailing colour; ſo that a very few years will, in all probability, induce a total change. The neck and back, along the courſe of the vertebræ, maintain their priſtine hue the moſt, and in ſome ſpots proclaim their original ſtate: the head, face, and breaſt, with belly, legs, arms, and thighs, are almoſt wholly white; the pudenda and axillæ party-coloured; the ſkin of theſe parts, as far as white, being covered with white hair; where dark, with black. Her face and breaſt, as often as the paſſions anger, ſhame, *&c.* have been

excited in her, have been immediately obſerved to glow with bluſhes; as alſo when, in purſuance of her buſineſs, ſhe has been expoſed to the action of the fire upon theſe parts, ſome freckles have made their appearance. After having deſcribed her preſent appearance, as well as I am able, I ſhall not pretend to offer any conjectures of my own upon the ſubject; leſt being led away by a train of reaſoning, I ſhould loſe myſelf, in endeavouring to eſtabliſh a favourite hypotheſis; but, on the contrary, ſhall confine myſelf to a ſimple narration of ſuch facts, as may prevent miſtakes, or obviate difficulties, ariſing in the inveſtigation of this difficult piece of phyſical hiſtory. And in the firſt place, leſt the change ſhould be thought the conſequence of a previous morbid ſtate, ſhe declares, that, excepting about ſeventeen years ago, when ſhe was delivered of a child, ſhe hath never been afflicted by any complaint of 24 hours continuance; and that ſhe never remembers the catamenia to have been either irregular or obſtructed, only during this pregnancy: ſhe hath never been ſubject to any cutaneous diſorders, or made uſe of any external applications, by which this phænomenon might be produced. The effects of the bile upon the ſkin are well known to phyſicians, and have given riſe to an opinion, that its colour was determined thereby: for my own part I cannot believe it has any thing to do here, ſince, from all the circumſtances I have been able to collect, I cannot find the leaſt reaſon to ſuſpect, that this fluid, whether cyſtic or hepatic, has undergone any alteration. As uſtion is known to make the ſkin of negroes become white, and as ſhe is daily employed in the buſineſſes

of cookery, it may perhaps be ſuppoſed the effect of heat: but this can never be the caſe, as ſhe has ever been well clad; and the change is as obvious in the parts protected from the action of that element, as in thoſe the moſt expoſed thereto. As an emunctory, the ſkin ſeems to perform its office as well as poſſible, the ſweat with the greateſt freedom indifferently pervading the black and white parts. The effects of a bliſter I mentioned to you I am yet a ſtranger to, as that, which I applied upon the outſide of the arm, did not anſwer the intended purpoſe: whether this was owing to its being laid upon a part too much expoſed, or that the corpus reticulare being deſtroyed, there may be ſuch an adheſion of the cuticle to the cutis, as may render them inſeparable, a ſecond experiment muſt determine. If, upon your ſending this to Dr. Ruſſell, he, or any of his learned acquaintance, to whom he may communicate it, ſhall think any future experiments neceſſary, I ſhall be glad to execute them under their directions, not only for my private ſatisfaction, but in order to convince you, how much pleaſure I take in doing every thing, that may oblige Mr. Williamſon or his friends.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient humble Servant,

Leonard-Town,
6th Sept. 1758.

James Bate,
Surgeon in Maryland.